

Drury J. Sizer
City Document. — No. 101.

CITY OF BOSTON.

15



PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

DEDICATION

OF THE

ETHER MONUMENT.

1868.

The following pages comprise a sketch of the origin of the monument in commemoration of the discovery of the anæsthetic properties of ether, which structure was erected in the Public Garden by the munificence of the late Thomas Lee of Boston, and was dedicated with appropriate services on Saturday, June 27, 1868.

CITY OF BOSTON.

In Board of Aldermen, June 29, 1868.

Ordered, That an account of the ceremonies connected with the presentation to the City and the dedication of the Ether Monument upon the Public Garden, be printed for preservation with the City Documents.

Passed; sent down for concurrence.

G. W. MESSINGER, *Chairman.*

In Common Council, July 2, 1868.

Concurred.

CHARLES H. ALLEN, *President.*

Approved, July 3, 1868.

NATHANIEL B. SHURTLEFF, *Mayor.*

A true copy.

Attest:

S. F. McCLEARY, *City Clerk.*

CITY OF BOSTON.

AT a meeting of the Board of Aldermen, held March 19, 1866, HON. FREDERIC W. LINCOLN, JR., the Mayor, submitted to the Board the following message :

GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN.

I have the honor of laying before you a communication from THOMAS LEE, Esquire, proposing, if acceptable to the city, to erect at his own expense a monument on the Public Garden in commemoration of the greatest medical discovery of our time,—the application of the properties of ether to the alleviation of pain and human suffering. Mr. Lee's gift to the city of the statue of Hamilton, now standing on Commonwealth Avenue, has already received the acknowledgments of the government and the gratitude of our citizens. This renewed token of his interest in the embellishment of our public grounds; and the peculiar sentiments sought to be embodied in the proposed memorial, calls for a similar expression of our appreciation of his public spirit and liberality. There can be no doubt that the discovery and the first successful application of ether as an anæsthetic was made in our own city; and thus Boston has acquired an historical renown on its account which renders it eminently proper that a monument to its honor should be erected within our municipal limits. The benefits of ether are for all mankind; it is used throughout the world, wherever scientific medical and surgical treatment is practised; and while its early history might seem to justify a certain degree of local pride, yet the monument in itself will be an expression of gratitude and

thanksgiving. It is not an insignificant fact that the period of its erection occurs soon after a terrible war was brought to a close, the necessary miseries of which were considerably alleviated by the use of this agent. The design of the monument is appropriate. The base is composed of a series of fountains, supplying the pool with living water, reminding the spectator of the pool of Bethesda, where the sick waited to be cured of their diseases. The top is surmounted by the figure of the Good Samaritan, illustrating one of the most beautiful parables of our Saviour, and teaching a lesson we are so apt to forget in the bustle and turmoil of a great city, that we are all brothers, and that our nearest neighbor is he who most needs our mercy and charity. This proposition is another illustration of the enlightened and disinterested spirit of many of our opulent citizens. It is seen in the liberal endowment of our literary and charitable institutions, and, in its most graceful form, exhibited in those works of art which adorn and embellish the city,—objects of pride to our own people and an attraction to the stranger. I trust that your Board will sanction the enterprise proposed by Mr. Lee, and grant the request.

F. W. LINCOLN, JR., *Mayor*.

Boston, March 13, 1866.

Hon. F. W. Lincoln, Jr., Mayor of the City of Boston:

Sir,—I propose to erect and present to the city a monument in the form of a fountain, as an expression of gratitude for the relief of human suffering occasioned by the discovery of the anæsthetic properties of sulphuric ether. As a site I respectfully suggest a position in the Public Garden opposite Marlborough Street, about one hundred feet from Arlington Street. I have intrusted the designing and superintendence of this monument to Messrs. Ware and Van Brunt, architects, of this city, to whom I refer you for all further information on the subject. I beg to be informed at the earliest moment, if this proposition is acceptable to the City Government, whether they will authorize the use of the site named, and will furnish the necessary connection with the water pipes and drains.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

THOMAS LEE.

The foregoing communication having been read, was referred to the Committee on the Common and Public Squares.

In Board of Aldermen, March 26, 1866.

The Committee on Common and Public Squares, to whom was referred the communication of His Honor the Mayor relative to the proposal of Thomas Lee, Esquire, to present to the city a memorial fountain designed to commemorate the discovery of the anæsthetic properties of ether, beg leave to report: That, in their opinion, this renewed instance of patriotic munificence on the part of Mr. Lee merits the grateful acknowledgment of the City Government, and that His Honor the Mayor be requested to communicate the same to that gentleman, in such terms as he may deem appropriate; that the position for the proposed structure, on the Public Garden, opposite Marlborough Street, suggested by the donor, is approved by the Committee; that in view of the ample supply of water to be secured by the new reservoir now building, the quantity required to give full effect to the proposed fountain may be furnished without detriment to the citizens, and that the Water Board should be directed to furnish the same.

Per order of the Committee.

JOHN S. TYLER, *Chairman.*

The Committee submit the following orders:

Ordered, That so much of the Public Garden as may be required as a site for the Memorial Fountain presented to the city by Thomas Lee, Esquire, be set apart for that purpose.

Ordered, That whenever the Memorial Fountain presented by Thomas Lee, Esquire, to the city, shall be completed and erected, the Water Board shall cause the same to be supplied constantly with as much water as may be necessary to give the fountain its proper effect.

Read twice and passed.

Approved by the Mayor, March 27, 1866.

The site for the monument having been selected, work was at once commenced thereon, and, the monument having been entirely completed, it was surrendered to the care of the municipal government of Boston on Saturday, June 27, 1868, by the following simple ceremonies. The venerable Thomas Lee having died before the completion of the monument, Dr. Henry J. Bigelow, surgeon at the Massachusetts General Hospital, where the first capital operations were performed with the aid of sulphuric ether, was selected by the friends of Mr. Lee to deliver the address of dedication.

The address was pronounced in the Public Garden by Dr. Bigelow, who delivered the monument to HON. NATHANIEL B. SHURTLEFF, Mayor of the City, in the following words:—

Mr. Mayor,—It was the wish of the late venerable gentleman who caused this monument to be erected, to rear an enduring memorial of the discovery in Boston, from which dates the era of painless surgery; and also that on some fitting occasion it should be offered for the acceptance of his fellow-citizens.

In no act of a long life, characterized by many deeds of liberality, by the exercise of a refined and cultivated taste for nature and for art, and by a discriminating judgment of men and of passing events, did he show greater discernment than when he organized this work; and although he did not live to see it executed, he had so far supervised its plans, and so intrusted them to skilful hands, that no difficulty was met with in completing its beautiful design in detailed conformity to his wishes.

This monument is intended, in the words of the tablet, which were written since his death, "To commemorate the discovery that the inhaling of ether causes insensibility of pain; first proved to the world at the Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, October, A. D. 1846," by its appliance during a protracted dissection, which, when followed by one of the severest

operations known to surgery, was a final and conclusive test in a close and connected series of successful experiments, which proved that pain could be annulled; first, with certainty, no matter who the individual; secondly, with completeness, no matter how great might be its degree; and thirdly, with safety. These three points were all absolutely involved in the discovery, and these alone. Before the consecutive experiments which culminated in those here recorded, neither of these points had been established by conclusive proof. The world was ignorant of the great truths they asserted, the discovery had not been made.

The philanthropist had indeed yearned to relieve suffering humanity; the poet had prophetically announced a world freed from physical pain; the philosopher had made fruitless efforts to unveil the hidden secret. Instances of accidental insensibility had been observed. Here and there an ingenious man had devised and tried some single experiment with greater or less success, and then abandoned the pursuit; or tantalized by a possibility, at one moment in his grasp, and in the next eluding it, stimulated by a flattering promise of achieving something at once practical and useful, had followed up his experiments hopefully, until some great public failure disheartened him, made his proselytes incredulous, and left the world still to suffer pain.

Men had been made insensible to pain through mental excitement, or by the agency of mesmerism or hypnotism, by the dead drunkenness of alcohol, the narcotism of opium, the inhalation of nitrous oxide and other gases, and even by the vapor of ether. For years all this had been known to be possible, but it attracted little attention. These previous experiments instituted by different persons were inconclusive because they led to no constant result; the anæsthesia could not be relied on, or it was not demonstrated that it could be relied on, either as sure to occur or as proof against the severer forms of pain. The question of danger from this extraordinary trance was also

unsettled. No consulting board of surgeons would have dared to sanction the production of prolonged unconsciousness during an operation, before the series of consecutive experiments were made here in Tremont Street and at the hospital. There had been a lack of perseverance or of good fortune in the experiments, or an imperfection in their materials or method, and the future discovery which was soon to burst upon the world halted for an interval of years at this imperfect stage. The whole progress of all invention and discovery has been a monotonous catalogue of such imperfect efforts and such failures. But when these consecutive experiments had been made in Boston, the discovery had been made; and in grateful and unhesitating recognition of it, the entire civilized world simultaneously rose up to hail it with acclamatory welcome.

Thus was made the discovery, and thus was begun the career of anæsthetic inhalation. Modifications, imitations and substitutes have sprung up in all civilized countries. New processes and new materials will yet be furnished by science, or demanded by convenience or economy, but after more than twenty years of its successful trial, nothing has been found to surpass, in its efficiency or unqualified safety, the original ether then used.

To commemorate the triple and demonstrated discovery, not of a probable, an uncertain or untrustworthy, but of an inevitable, complete and safe anæsthesia, this monument has been erected in a city which was the humble instrument of Divine Providence in diffusing to the nations this incalculable blessing.

I well remember when the eloquent and gifted man whose brazen effigy on yonder pedestal so powerfully recalls his living presence, in an address delivered at the Medical College on the 4th of November, 1846, said, with an unconscious foreshadowing of what was soon to happen, "I cannot suppress the remark that the great principle of analogy seems to authorize the hope that . . . further discoveries may be expected scarcely less brilliant than that of vaccination." How far even this prophetic

inspiration fell short of the reality! How little did he dream that the lapse of a few brief days would herald to the earth the greatest boon ever accorded to the physical welfare of mankind; days of discovery that forever silenced the dreadful shriek of agony which many of us can yet recall in the surgical amphitheatre of the institution whose name is now immortalized, that stilled the moan of the soldier stricken down upon the battlefield, assuaged the pangs of disease, softened the approach of death, and lent a sweet obliviousness in what was once its hour of anguish to all animal existence, from the poor suffering brute up to humanity, to man born of woman and to woman of whom man is born.

In the name and at the request of my venerable friend, the late Mr. Thomas Lee, of his executors, and of the gentlemen to whom he intrusted the arrangement of this ceremony, I offer this memorial to you, sir, and through you to the City of Boston.

At the conclusion of the remarks of Dr. Bigelow, Mayor Shurtleff responded as follows:—

In behalf of the municipal authorities of Boston, I now formally receive from you the gift of Mr. Thomas Lee; and promise that it shall be watched with care and protected from injury. And may this elegant structure long remain unimpaired by time—a memorial of the greatest boon ever vouchsafed to suffering humanity, and a monument of the gratitude of one of Boston's most worthy citizens.

The exercises were closed with an appropriate prayer by Rev. Samuel K. Lothrop, D. D.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT.

The monument was designed by Messrs. Ware & Van Brunt, architects, of this city.

The form of the monument is suggested by mediæval types, modified by the nature of the white Concord granite used in its construction. It is about thirty feet in height and arises from a square basin. Its base is cubical, leaving on each vertical face a niche containing a spouting lion's head, with sculptured water lilies and other aquatic plants. Upon this base or plinth, rests a sur-base adorned with mouldings, from which arises a die, bearing upon each of its four sides an inscription, surmounted by a bass-relief in marble. These are sunk in the tympana of four pointed and cuspidated arches, supported each by two stunted shafts of red Gloucester granite, the capitals of which are enriched by poppies and oak leaves, this decoration being carried around the monument on the same level in a band or string course.

These arches form a canopy, square in plan, from which the structure diminishes by a series of mouldings to the base of a grouped quadripartite shaft of polished red granite. Its capital, which is decorated with oak leaves, bears on its abacus a group setting forth the story of "the good Samaritan," the type of the relief of suffering.

The inscriptions and bass-reliefs on the four sides are successively as follows:—

I.

To commemorate
the discovery
that the inhalation of ether
causes insensibility to pain.
First proved to the world
at the Mass. General Hospital
in Boston,
October, A. D. MDCCCXLVI.

The bass-relief accompanying this represents a surgical operation in a civic hospital, the patient being under the influence of ether.

II.

Neither shall there be any more pain.

[Revelation.

With an allegorical bass-relief of the angel of mercy descending to relieve suffering humanity.

III.

In gratitude
for the relief
of human suffering
by the inhaling of ether,
a citizen of Boston
has erected
this monument.

A. D. MDCCCLXVII.

With a bass-relief of a field hospital, with a wounded soldier in the hands of the surgeons.

IV.

This also cometh forth
from the Lord of Hosts,
which is wonderful
in counsel
and excellent
in working.

[Isaiah.

The bass-relief accompanying this inscription is an allegory of the triumph of science.

The model for the crowning group is from the studio of Mr. J. Q. A. Ward, sculptor, of New York. It is executed in granite by Mr. Garrett Barry of Quincy. The four marble bas-reliefs are also the work of Mr. Ward. Mr. Thomas Hollis of Milton was the contractor for the granite work, which was executed at the yard of Mr. D. C. Hutchinson of this city. The masonry is by Mr. Martin L. Whitcher.

By a vote of the City Council, passed July 3, 1868, the inscription "THE GIFT OF THOMAS LEE," was placed on the bases of the Ether Monument and of the Hamilton Statue.

